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CONTINUING

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TWO NOTABLE utterances of distinguished representatives of Systematic Theology have recently appeared in public print. In an address before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, President Patton of Princeton College affirms that the great question of today is not what the Bible teaches, but what the Bible is. This latter question, he declares, cannot be answered by appeal to proof texts drawn from the Bible to prove its own inspiration. The right of the Bible to rule the hearts and consciences of men is the pressing question, and its discussion involves considerations of history, philosophy, and literary criticism. President Patton believes that the John Calvin of the new theological era will believe in the same doctrine that Calvin of Geneva believed in. "But when he gathers up the results of all this modern discussion he will present them not only as doctrines that have a logical relation in a system but as divine ideas that have a chronological sequence in the unfolding of a plan. The historical method will leave its mark upon theology." We do not care to discuss with Dr. Patton whether John Calvin of Geneva, without an historical method, anticipated by a few hundred years precisely the results, from a doctrinal point of view, which historical science by its laborious method is after a time to reach. But we are interested to notice his clear recognition and assertion of the legitimacy and necessity of the historical method in theology, and, as a part of this, of that which is technically

known as "higher criticism." If President Patton has been correctly reported, he makes explicitly or impliedly four assertions. 1. The great task of the hour in theology is the attainment of a "doctrine of Scripture," a true statement of the nature of the Bible and the ground of its authority. 2. This doctrine cannot be reached by simply formulating the Scriptural doctrine of the nature of Scripture. Dr. Patton does not intimate that the Scriptural doctrine is not the true one, but only that the Scripture cannot be treated as an ultimate authority in answering the question, What is the authority of Scripture? 3. The right of the Scripture to rule the hearts and consciences of men, *i. e.*, the authority of the Scripture in ethics and religion is to be established, in part at least, on grounds of history, philosophy, and criticism. 4. The method of the systematic theology of the future will be not only logical, but historical. We believe that these things are true, and we are grateful to President Patton for his forcible statement of them. But if they are true, this means nothing less than that biblical criticism, in the large sense of the term, is for Christian scholarship the pressing duty of this hour, and that for the systematic theologian of the future a prime condition of success will be a command of the historical method.

PRESIDENT HOVEY of Newton Theological Institution in a sermon to the graduating class on the Problems of the Bible and Philosophy, gives this advice concerning the treatment of critical theories which impeach the credibility of the Pentateuch and Joshua: "Have no fear of honest inquiry, for truth is likely to prevail at last. The danger of stagnation and repression are greater in the long run than those of bold investigation; timidity is at least as foolish as audacity, especially in the search for truth. Take all the time you need for testing every novel theory concerning the Pentateuch. For the critical pendulum has oscillated perpetually during the last fifty years, and you will have no reason for haste in fixing the point where it will finally rest. The elements of this critical problem are very complex and scattered

PRESIDENT
HOVEY ON
HIGHER
CRITICISM

through a large part of the Old Testament. Probably no man has mastered them all. Be patient, therefore, and trustful." It is plain that President Hovey recognizes the legitimacy of historical criticism. But the yet more notable implication of these words is that the problems of historical criticism—certain at least of those which have been most discussed and concerning which most alarm has been felt by the timid—are not after all the fundamental problems of religion. Were they such, the preacher of the gospel would be compelled to settle them at the very outset of his ministry.

THESE two utterances of President Patton and President Hovey seem at first sight to be almost contradictory. President Patton declares that the question of the nature of the Bible is the pressing question of the hour, and that this cannot be settled without historical criticism. President Hovey tells us that the questions of historical criticism are not likely to be settled at once, and implies that some at least of them are so far from being the fundamental questions of religion that the Christian preacher may afford to be very patient in waiting for their solution while he goes about his distinctive work as a preacher. But this apparent contradiction between the two utterances is no real contradiction. To say that a question is the pressing question of the hour is not to say that it is the fundamental question of religion; is not to say that in it Christianity is on trial for its life.

The inclination of the theologian, indeed of every earnest-minded thinker, is to feel that every great problem is fundamental. But it is a result well worth achieving to learn that this is not so; that there are some questions, large and important in themselves, questions which may easily be for a given generation the great questions, on which nevertheless the destiny neither of religion in general nor of Christianity in particular hangs. To this class belong the great problems of the higher criticism. Important they are; it is difficult to overestimate the possible effect of their

solution on Christian thought and Christian life. Fundamental they are not. If it was not possible to discern this when the questions were first raised in modern times, the progress that has already been made render it possible now. Historical criticism does not threaten the foundations of religion or of Christianity. Not only so; but, while much is still in litigation, the beneficial effects of the higher criticism are, as President Hovey admirably points out in further paragraphs of his sermon, already apparent. President Patton is right. The problem of what the Bible is, itself to be solved by the historical study of the Bible, is the great problem of Christian theology today. Christian scholarship has no higher duty in this hour than the prosecution of the work of higher criticism. President Hovey is right. These problems are not fundamental in the sense that on them hangs the destiny of Christianity. We can afford to be patient and trustful while Christian scholarship discovers their solution.

IN rather decided contrast with the words of these two masters of theological science are the words of many men less skilled in Christian doctrine, though more prominent in evangelistic effort. To them—if the recently published words of a certain distinguished evangelist are correct—any attempt to separate the Bible into parts of different value is dangerous and to be avoided. The argument is simple; if you give up a part of the Scripture, what is to hinder another from giving up another part, until no Scripture is left. This argument is enforced with the story of the good deacon who cut out such passages from his Bible as his minister said were untrue until nothing of the book was left, and then presented the bewildered pastor with the covers. Another method of enforcing the position is to appeal to the number of converts made by men holding to the extremest conservative views in regard to inspiration, and to the paucity of conversions made by those who hold to “higher criticism.” Both arguments are supposed to establish the danger of the higher criticism as a means of studying the Scriptures.

*AN OPPOSITE
OPINION*

Now nobody can deny that there is a danger in a rash rejection of any portion of the Scripture as untrustworthy. That there has been too much of such rash rejection is also very likely. But to maintain that there can be no standard of judgment is not only unscholarly, but contrary to the history of the church. The merest tyro in the history of the canon knows that even in the case of the New Testament different sections of the church have never hesitated to reject certain books on purely critical grounds. But further, the acceptance or the rejection of a single word of Scripture or any other piece of literature is not a matter of personal like or dislike. No one is quicker than the "higher critic" to detect the untrustworthiness of any such subjective test. The whole question is one of standards by which to judge. If a hard-working and successful evangelist believes every word of the Bible was written at the dictation of God and by the persons whose names are attached to the various books, he doubtless has criteria that satisfy him. Without doubt such an inclusive conviction is of great homiletic advantage, especially when there exists an equally strong conviction that his interpretation is as infallible as the Word itself. But, after all, such a conviction is simply the outcome of certain processes of judgment. And it is a fair question as to whether, in the long run, the acceptance by Christians generally of a belief in the Bible on the mere basis of such authority will be as helpful to Christian growth as the acceptance of the Bible on the basis of a more discriminating judgment. Nor is it quite fair to imply that "higher critics" are endeavoring to reject portions of the Scriptures. As mere critics they are seeking neither to reject nor to accept anything. They are simply striving to arrive at the truth. An intelligent study of their work—not that of the *destructive* critics, so-called—will convince any man who is anxious for the preservation of the faith once delivered to the saints that there has been no stronger weapon of Christian apologetics than "higher criticism." Indiscriminate opposition to critical methods as such is largely the result of ignorance as to what such methods really are. To say that if one verse of the Scripture

THE VALUE OF
THE MAIN
ARGUMENT

is declared unauthentic all must be rejected is as sensible as to say that all money must be rejected because of the detection of a counterfeit. The more rational view would seem to be that of thankfulness that it is possible so to distinguish between the genuine and the interpolated as to give a firm basis for theological teaching. Such a possibility, thanks to the "higher critic," is every day growing more complete.

THE illustration of the mutilated Bible cannot be regarded with the same equanimity as the position it enforces. It certainly is taking. But it is intrinsically untrue. Who was the minister? Did he ever exist outside a book of sermonic illustrations? And it is as improbable as untrue. Did the scissors-wielding deacon have a Bible with pages printed on only one side? Or did he cut out the texts on both sides at once?

To resort to such an illustration as an argument is unworthy of any candid man—and especially of a teacher of religion. Are there no ethical limitations in the use of telling but untrue analogies? Is it allowable to use such *ad captandum* arguments in the settlement of what men whose opinion is worth everything regard as important questions? It is a relic of an unchristian theological past to make prejudice the jury before which to try an honest attempt at the discovery of truth.

AND then it is astonishing to make the number of his conversions a gauge of the correctness of a man's attitude towards the "higher criticism." Was Peter with his two thousand conversions any nearer the truth than his Master? The question as to the authenticity of Jonah is not to be settled by counting new converts. Even if the argument be that the "higher criticism" cuts the nerve of evangelical activity, the statement is as yet one of very doubtful fact. To say nothing of the short time in which criticism has attracted the attention of the church, it is not true that the men who hold to its results are without spiritual influence. They

THE UNFAIR-
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may be less effective in revival meetings, but many of them are centers of strong and edifying religious influence. Their criticism is an outcome not of their contempt but of their love for the Christian Scriptures.

THE proper attitude of all Christian people towards the results of "higher criticism" is one of impartial investigation. No one really objects to the critical method itself. The point at issue is as to its results. There is little need of alarm. Truth will not perish, and the truth, after all, is the goal of honest scholarship. The words of Presidents Patton and Hovey are of vast worth for all those who are perplexed as to the merits of today's discussions and should lead to confidence in the final outcome. In the meantime let us stop confounding important questions with those that are essential, and above all, a man's attitude towards questions of mere scholarship with his moral and religious character.

THE PROPER
ATTITUDE